

2019 Theme Narrative:

TRIUMPH & TRAGEDY IN HISTORY

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During the 2018–2019 school year you and all National History Day students will dive into a topic based on the theme *Triumph & Tragedy in History*. You will ask questions about time, place and context, cause and effect, change over time, and impact and significance. You must consider not only when and where events happened, but also why they occurred, and what factors contributed to their development. You will describe your topic and then further develop it through analysis, drawing conclusions about how the topic influenced and was influenced by people, ideas, or events.

Each year National History Day selects a theme that is intentionally broad enough so that you can select topics from anywhere in the world and any time period. After deciding on your research topic, you must investigate historical context, historical significance, and the topic's relationship to the theme by conducting research in libraries, archives, and museums; through oral history interviews; and by visiting historic sites. Also remember to use evidence from your research to explain how your topic has influenced history. How did your topic create change?

Does every project need to include both triumph and tragedy? That depends on the topic you select. Look closely—most topics will include elements of both triumph and tragedy. History is inherently uneven, and there will not always be an equal split between the two sides. Do not ignore connections to both aspects of the theme when they exist, but do not force your topic to fit into both sides of the theme.

The *Triumph & Tragedy in History* theme is complex and requires you to view history through multiple perspectives. Can one person's triumph be another's tragedy? Can the same person or group suffer from tragedy and triumph at the same time? How does one ultimately triumph after tragedy? Can triumph lead to tragedy? Throughout this academic year you will ask yourself these questions and more, always looking for how and why.

What is triumph? According to *Merriam Webster*, the definition of triumph is "a victory or conquest by or as if by military force, or a notable success." What does that mean in history? How can you define a historical event as a triumph? The first definition listed is victory by military force. Looking at military battles provides examples of triumphs, and tragedies, throughout history. Also contemplate the second definition, "a notable success." How would you define a notable success in history? Consider the first organ transplant, or the first time Alexander Graham Bell spoke into the telephone and someone heard him at the other end. Does history remember those events as triumphs? If so, why? What makes them triumphant?

What is tragedy? *Merriam Webster* defines tragedy as a "disastrous event." What are some examples of disastrous events throughout history? You could look to England in the mid-1500s. Many remember Lady Jane Grey as a tragic figure, but what makes her situation tragic? Or think back to America's Trail of Tears. What decisions allowed that event to come to fruition? What was the impact of those decisions? Who suffered the consequences? Examine the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989. What were the consequences of those Beijing protests?

Can one person's triumph be another's tragedy? Whether an event is considered a tragedy or a triumph depends on one's perspective. Often a triumph for one is a tragedy for another. The American Civil War offers numerous opportunities for in-depth research on a single aspect of the war. There were many triumphs, the North over the South, unionism over sectionalism, freedom over slavery, but what tragedies resulted because of this conflict? Did everyone feel that those were triumphs? Why or why not? How did one side view the events and consequences compared to the other side? If you are interested in architecture, perhaps you might choose to research the San Francisco earthquakes of 1906 and 1989. How did the consequences of the 1906 earthquake influence changes in engineering and design that would lessen the damage of the 1989 earthquake?